Evaluate the importance of the “Sarajevo Incident” relative to other causes of the First World War.

Ever since the Kaiser William II came to power after 1890, the international scene was becoming more intense and the conflicts between various nationalistic movements such as Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism, Greater Serbia Movement and Austrian nationalism were further intensified. The outbreak of Sarajevo Assassination made war inevitable. However, it was only a catalyst to the outbreak of war as the seeds for the outbreak of WWI had long been sown.

The Sarajevo Incident was the work of Black Hand, who had assassinated the future heir of Austria, Archduke Ferdinand and his wife. Austria reacted furiously and was determined to grab this golden opportunity to crash Serbia once and for all so as to kick off Serbia from the Balkans.

The Sarajevo Incident was important as Germany promised to provide unconditional support to Austria known as the “blank cheque”, which led to the very harsh Austrian ultimatum to Serbia and further pushing the two parties into war. Besides, German support of Austria and her too much reliance on the Schlieffen Plan dragged both Russia and France into war. Though the Sarajevo Incident served as a catalyst that sparked off the open conflicts between the two camps, there were some other deep-rooted problems that led to the deterioration of the international relations should not be overlooked.

After 1870, Austria’s influence had gradually decline and she would like to expand to the Balkan states to gain some prestige and to maintain her Power’s status in Europe. It eventually led to conflicts with Serbia and Russia. The clash of Austrian nationalism and Greater Serbia Movement led to several crises in Europe, such as the Bosnian Crisis. The Austrian occupation of Bosnia angered the Serbs for dashing her dream of creating a greater Serbia; it paved way for the Sarajevo Incident, which led to the outbreak of WWI. The clash was further intensified with Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism, as what stood behind Austria and Serbia were Germany and Russia. It turned the Balkans into the powder keg and it complicated international relations.

The Balkans Wars further deteriorated the international relations. Austrian obstruction to Greater Serbia Movement was shown by the formation of independent Albania. Though Russia backed down under German pressure, Europe was covered with war atmosphere and revengeful feeling. All these demonstrated the fact that long-developed hatred and conflicts had been existed even long
before the Sarajevo Incident.

Undoubtedly, Germany played an extremely important role in causing the war. Ever since the rule of Kaiser William II, Austria remained Germany’s only ally. Under the influence of the German chancellor, Hostlein, Russian friendship was not treasured and the reinsurance treaty was not renewed in 1890. The construction of the Berlin-Baghdad Railway extent her influence to the Balkans and the Middle East had made her rivals with Russia. The conflicts over the Balkans further intensified the rivals between Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism that it pushed Russia to the side of France and divided Europe into two armed camps.

Besides, Germany played another important role in speeding up the armament race. For example, Britain built its first dreadnought in 1906 and she followed in 1913. in 1898, several Navy Laws were passed to increased German number of battleships, which was regarded as a luxury for a continental country. Definitely, Britain regarded the German action a challenge to her naval supremacy and the Anglo-German relations were deteriorated. Kaiser’s unskillful diplomatic skills and aggressive character in asking for a place in the sun gave serious blow to international harmony. The Schlieffen Plan, which had violated the neutrality of Belgium, finally dragged Britain into war.

Furthermore, the alliance system also led to the war indirectly. Though the alliance system was defensive in nature, it aroused strong suspicion and fear in Europe by dividing it into two camps. Despite its nature of turning a local dispute into a general war, the outbreak of the WWI was not very much because of the alliance system. For example, Britain entered into the war for Belgian neutrality and Italy even joined the side of the Allies for the promised territories in the secret agreement with France.

Some historian even claimed that imperialism served as another important source of conflicts in leading to the WWI. For examples, Triple Alliance was formed due to the conflict between France and Italy over Tunisia. The clash between the Triple Entente and Triple Alliance in the Moroccan Crises also sowed the seeds for the outbreak of war. However, imperialism should not be the most important factor in leading the war as most of the colonial conflicts had been settled before 1914. It was rather the deep-rooted hatred among the Powers and the diplomats’ miscalculation of a quick and local war that led to the outbreak of war.

To conclude, Sarajevo Incident was the sparking fire that set off the war. The other long-term causes such as extreme nationalism, imperialism, armament race and alliance system acted as more decisive factors in leading to the war.